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SUBJECT: OFFICIAL ELECTION RESULTS SLIGHTLY REDUCE RULING  
PARTY DOMINANCE

REF: A. LIBREVILLE 712

1B. LIBREVILLE 598

11. Summary: Gabon's ruling party won 81 out of 120 seats in the National assembly; other candidates expected to support the government won an additional 21 seats. Opposition parties have a larger presence than in the past, with 17 seats. Electoral reforms may have contributed to greater transparency, as the Constitutional Court reversed the results announced by the Minister of Interior in three constituencies. End summary.

12. On December 27 the Constitutional Court declared official the results of Gabon's December 17 and December 24 legislative elections. Losing candidates have 15 days to appeal and present evidence to overturn results. The Court, which based its rulings on the official results reported by polling places, changed two results and declared that one constituency would require a new election. The court also announced sanctions against a number of candidates for campaign violence and vandalism. The official results give the ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) 81 seats, parties allied with the PDG 16 seats, opposition parties 17 seats and independent/other candidates 5 seats. Mba Abessole' Rally for Gabon (RPG) and Pierre Mamboundou's Union of Gabonese Patriots (UPG) each won 8 seats.

13. The Court's decision to change several winning candidates announced by the Minister of Interior was unprecedented in Gabon and is being widely applauded as a sign of increased fairness. Two of the overturned candidates were PDG members and the third was a senior leader of a close ally of the PDG. President Bongo in May agreed to the long-standing demand of opposition parties that they be given official copies of polling place results. The fact that the opposition parties had these documents virtually forced the Court to overturn the announced results.

14. The voter participation rate was low in cities, but higher in rural areas. Nationwide, 37% of registered voters cast ballots. Many constituencies have few registered voters allowing well-organized campaigns to get out the vote easily. For example, Minister of Interior Ngari's constituency in the province of Haut Ogooue had 4516 voters registered. 4369 (97%) voted, and 4364 of them (99.9%) voted for Ngari. Defense Minister (and Presidential son) Ali Bongo Ondimba had the second highest rate of support; 88% of 2411 voters turned out, and 97.5% of them voted for Ali. Nationwide, 52% of those casting votes gave their support to a candidate from the ruling PDG, 8% voted for the UPG, 8% for Zachary Myboto's Gabonese Union for Democracy and Development (UGDD) and 6% for the RPG.

15. Comment: This election confirms the dominance of the ruling party, although it gives opposition parties a greater voice than they have had in the past. The Constitutional Court's decision could be seen as evidence of impartiality or simply as recognition that electoral reforms make old habits unsustainable. It is being seen by some as a rebuke aimed at the Minister of Interior--who was several months ago sharply criticized for allegedly seeking to sell Gabonese territory to Equatorial Guinea (Ref B).

WALKLEY